

VIETNAM AFFAIRS STAFF

Approved For Release 2001/08/07 : CIA-RDP72-00337R00030031-6

DATE 18 Dec 69

Mr. John M. Maury ✓

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SUBJECT: Phoenix/PRU Background

REMARKS:

Per the request levied by the Director at the Executive Committee meeting on Monday, 15 December 1969, attached is a background memorandum on the Phoenix program and the role played therein by the PRU program. This memorandum can be used or drawn upon in briefing members of Congress or in fielding press enquiries.

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Vietnam

C U R R E N T I N F O R M A T I O N

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16 December 1969

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Phoenix and Provincial Reconnaissance Unit Programs

1. Phoenix is an intelligence and operational effort aimed at identifying, ferreting out and arresting the leaders and key members of the Communist political structure in South Vietnam. This enemy apparatus -- known collectively as the Viet Cong infrastructure -- is the organization through which the Viet Cong control, or seek control over the South Vietnamese people. It includes the Communist Party's control structure, its subordinate command and administrative network, and the leadership of the parallel front organization, the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NLF). The destruction of this underground political and administrative structure, and its replacement by a GVN administration in the villages and hamlets of South Vietnam, is a vital part of the pacification program. It is the infrastructure that is the core of the Communist insurgency, directing and providing support for all the military, political, economic and psychological programs of the enemy. The importance of neutralizing this command structure will assume even greater importance in the event that the conflict shifts to the political plane.

2. While it has long been recognized that the attack against the infrastructure was essential, identifying the leaders and members of this covert group presented a formidable task. Over the years, the Communists have so intimidated the population through terror that they have been able to operate with impunity, secure in the belief that the people would not reveal their identities to the authorities. Having conclusively demonstrated how swift and terrible their retribution can be, the Viet Cong have thus been able to operate openly in recruiting guerrillas, raising taxes, impressing laborers, and kidnapping or assassinating those civil servants who cooperated with the government. Food, personnel and funds are extracted from the population by this highly efficient organization to support the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese military forces literally under the government's nose. Without the infrastructure and the coerced support of the peasantry the enemy could never sustain the military insurgency. But with the covert organization melded into the population and the population itself forced into submissiveness the Government of South Vietnam was unable to take any sustained, significant action against the heart of their problem.

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3. Clearly the solution had to be one of improved intelligence collection and of insured coordination among the various security services. This was the genesis of Phoenix. US advisory planning took two forms: the organization of intelligence and operations coordination centers in every district and secondly, programming the covert VC civilian apparatus as a specific target. The first activity became known as the District Intelligence and Operations Coordination Center (DIOCC) program, and the second was called Intelligence Coordination and Exploitation of the attack on the Viet Cong infrastructure (ICEX). Both were sponsored by the Agency in a support/advisory role with the full knowledge and cooperation of MACV, the US Corps commanders and the Government of Vietnam.

4. Phoenix, which combined the DIOCC's with ICEX, was formally established by MACV Directive 381-41, dated 9 July 1967, as the American side of the program for mounting an attack on the Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI). Once the DIOCC's were established and staffed with the appropriate representatives of the National Police and the other security services, the Government of Vietnam launched its parallel program, Phung Hoang, on 20 December 1967 (and thereby Vietnamized Phoenix) when the Prime Minister issued a letter of instruction which established the Phung Hoang plan and a national committee for it under the Minister of Interior. On 1 July 1968, the President of the Republic of South Vietnam in Decree Number 280-a/TT/SL formally sanctioned the Phung Hoang plan and simultaneously stated that the attack on the covert civilian VC organization (VCI) was of equal priority with the campaign against enemy military units. This decree made it clear that by VCI it meant "members of the Communist Party known as the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP) and the cadres which direct and control other parties and organizations in support of the VC." It specifically excluded "members of the VC military units, citizens forced to perform as laborers, and citizens living in VC-controlled areas."

5. The objective of the Phung Hoang plan as stated in the presidential decree was as follows:

"Concentrate and coordinate the efforts of all agencies to implement the Phung Hoang plan aimed at achieving maximum results in the task of eliminating the Viet Cong infrastructure."

The decree assigned the Phung Hoang mission as follows:

"The principal operational element within the Phung Hoang organization is the National Police, as stipulated in Decree 161-SL/AN of 30 October 1967.

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"The military forces are responsible for providing support to the National Police until the latter have sufficient capability to perform their missions. The Special Police Branch and the Police Field Force are the two components charged with eliminating the Viet Cong infrastructure, and when necessary, may receive support from other forces and resources.

"The mission of eliminating the Viet Cong infrastructure will be implemented at every level from central down to the village and hamlet level."

6. Since a primary objective of the Phung Hoang program is to gain intelligence on the enemy's identity, his plans, and his organization the GVN emphasizes the apprehension, rather than the killing, of the members of the Communist infrastructure. Directives specifically state that it is the policy of the GVN to treat detainees in a "fair, correct, and humane" manner. Rapid and equitable screening and release of innocent civilians, with a minimum of discomfort and dislocation, is also urged, in order not to "lessen the support of the people for the task of elimination of the Viet Cong infrastructure." Since Communist cadre are a valuable commodity, they are well protected by security elements, and generally resist when practicable; inevitably casualties occur on both sides.

7. The command structure for the Phung Hoang program has national, corps, provincial and district committee levels. The national chairman is the Minister of Interior and the committee Secretary General is the Director General of the National Police. Its membership contains representatives from the Defense Ministry, the Chieu Hoi (Open Arms) Ministry, the Revolutionary Development Ministry, the Military Security Service of the Army, the Special Police Branch, the Police Field Forces and the Joint General Staff. The composition at each of the lesser committee levels is essentially the same. Phoenix advisors exist at each of these levels, serving primarily as coordinators. Phoenix coordinators formerly were Agency personnel in the form of the ROIC's (Regional Officer in Charge/Base Chief) and the POIC's (Province Officer in Charge). In 1969 these coordination roles were assumed by CORDS military assignees, and the ROIC's and POIC's were subordinated to the role of deputy coordinator. Until now, the senior US Phoenix advisor and overall supervisor of the Phoenix advisory network has always been an Agency officer, loaned for this purpose to the Deputy COMUSMACV for CORDS (formerly Ambassador Komer, now Ambassador Colby). When the Vietnam tour of the officer now serving in that position ends in 1970, however, he will be replaced by an active duty military officer or a non-Agency civilian.

8. The main significance of the accomplishments of the Phoenix/Phung Hoang program lies in the fact that of the estimated total figure for VCI of 80,000, the programs neutralized 20% in 1968 and 17% in 1969 through August. Although the criteria for confirmed VCI neutralizations in 1968

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were fairly broad, in 1969 they became more stringent, requiring that the individual hold a position in the VC civilian organization which has been pre-designated, such as secretary of a village Current Affairs Committee. A very complete nationwide system for categorizing VCI has been worked out recently by the Phoenix program director and instituted by the Minister of Interior. This categorization includes involuntary personnel and also provides a specific sentence of so many years for each of three separate categories of VCI as follows:

a. Full or probationary members of the Communist Party at any echelon national through hamlet, 2 years.

b. Cadre other than leaders of any level from national to hamlet -- meaning a volunteer who has been trained and performs on a regular basis, 1-2 years.

c. All other elements who serve the Communist Party voluntarily or involuntarily, not to exceed 1 year.

9. The Provincial Reconnaissance Unit (PRU) program in South Vietnam provides both an investigative function and a para-military attack upon the VC infrastructure. PRU teams, currently totaling approximately 4,200 men, operate in 44 provinces. They are based in their home areas and operate in teams of 15 to 20 men. These teams act upon intelligence leads produced by Vietnamese and American units in the Phoenix/Phung Hoang program. They also have their own intelligence gathering capability. At the direction of the Vietnamese province chief, they conduct operations aimed specifically at capturing known members of the VCI, but also become involved in firefights with VC units. They are the most effective existing weapon for striking directly at the long entrenched Communist cadre who are making the insurgency possible. They seek to capture the hamlet, village and district level Communist cadre who coordinate village support for enemy main force units, and who direct terrorist and harassment attacks against Government of Vietnam officials and organizations in the countryside.

10. The PRU teams, while an important element in the Phoenix/Phung Hoang program, represent but one reaction force available to the district chief. During August 1969, Phoenix/Phung Hoang in its entirety neutralized 1,381 VCI. Of these, PRU teams were responsible for 207 (14%), although they represented less than one-half of 1% of the total forces supporting the Phoenix/Phung Hoang program. The PRU teams tie into the Phoenix/Phung Hoang program at the district and province level where they operate as part of the DIOCC and Provincial Intelligence and Operations Coordination Center (PIOCC). Their intelligence product on the VCI is turned over to the DIOCC or PIOCC,

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and they frequently react to the intelligence product on the VCI of other agencies such as the Special Police. A great deal of PRU time and effort is spent collecting information on the specific VCI targets assigned by the Phoenix/Phung Hoang program via DIOCC and PIOCC personnel. Upon the development of sufficient information, a decision as to exploitation is made, and frequently the PRU's are assigned the mission of capturing the target.

11. In FY 1969 PRU accomplishments included the capture of 12,140 cadre and guerrillas and the killing of 6,112. This represented 76 VC/VCI for every member of the PRU lost.

12. The PRU are completely under Vietnamese control and are essentially the responsibility of the Director General of National Police. The Agency is in an advisory/support role. Operational control is essentially in the hands of the Vietnamese province and district chiefs.

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